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AUTHOR Armstrong, William B.
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ABSTRACT

Community college reform legislation in California mandates the development and implementation of a comprehensive accountability model. The reform model implemented during the 1991-92 academic year will provide the legislature and state officials with outcomes and process data in five areas of community college services: student access, student success, student satisfaction, staff composition, and fiscal condition. The overall intent of this reform is to improve teaching and learning at community colleges. Uses for accountability reform include public relations; inter-college and district comparisons; program review and evaluation; campus budgets; and monitoring local indicators. The literature suggests that currently designed reform measures may not reach these intended goals. To increase the likelihood of successful implementation, institutional assessment should be driven by teaching and learning goals, and indicators should include more than outcomes-only data. Outcomes indicators might best be composite indicators comprised of collegiate context, student characteristics, process, and environmental variables measured longitudinally. The proposed model for accountability uses indicators not as barometers of effectiveness, but indicative of the conditions that facilitate positive change. Contains 15 references. (KP)

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ACCOUNTABILITY AS EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGES:

POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

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by
William B. Armstrong
Director, Research and Planning
San Diego Community College District

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community college reform legislation in California mandates the development and implementation of a comprehensive accountability model. This paper discusses the background and substance of this reform, its intended outcomes, and its prospects for achieving its stated goals. The model implemented during the 1991-1992 academic year will provide the legislature and state officials with outcome and process data in five areas of community college services. These are, student access, student success, student satisfaction, staff composition, and fiscal condition. Within each of the five areas, state planning groups have developed a series of indicators intended to yield information on systemwide status for annual reporting to the legislature. The overall intent of this reform is to improve teaching and learning at the community colleges. This is to be accomplished through state and local monitoring of the conditions of the community colleges and the collection of outcome indicators. This information will be used to provide benchmarks on college quality, observe trends over time, establish an accountability climate at the colleges, and to streamline current performance and reporting procedures. Research conducted at accountability model pilot sites and with state officials suggested that interpretation on the uses of the reform were found to differ among different levels of policy actors. State level college officials were interested in the public relations and symbolic aspects of the reform in leveraging funding from the legislature. Legislative staff were interested in using the information to make inter-college and district comparisons and assist in the resource allocation process at the state level. Local college staff were interested in using the information for program review and evaluation, campus budget development and monitoring local indicators. A review of literature on educational change and reform suggests that reform as currently designed may not reach its intended goals. This is because of incorrect assumptions made about the culture and context of the colleges, lack of agreement on college goals and valid indicators, conflicts of the accountability model with the college mission, and intrinsic contradictions within the accountability model that may result in undermining the very changes it strives to achieve. Options are presented and discussed to increase the likelihood of successful implementation of an accountability model which would provide indicators demanded by state legislators, and include important contextual information to lend meaning to the indicators. Institutional assessment ought to be driven by the teaching and learning goals espoused by community college educators. To improve practice, indicators should include more than outcomes-only data. Rather, outcomes indicators might best be composite indicators comprised of collegiate context, student characteristics, process, and environmental variables measured longitudinally. accountability should stress the community college's effectiveness in developing the individual talents of students. The proposed model for accountability uses indicators not as barometers of effectiveness, but indicative of the *conditions* that facilitate positive change.

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BACKGROUND

Assembly Bill 1725 (Vasconcellos, 1986) marks the latest re-definition of the mission of the California Community Colleges. This legislation reaffirmed the traditional components of the community college mission, and set priorities for the mission considering the growth of the "comprehensive" community college. In contrast to the prior decade which witnessed a phenomenal growth in non collegiate course offerings, a decline in the liberal arts, increases in community studies classes, and burgeoning enrollments, the colleges were again directed to emphasize the first two years of baccalaureate education and career education. This reform was far reaching. It also included fundamental changes in the governance, finance, and staffing patterns of the community colleges. AB 1725 was drafted in light of the new power relationship which had evolved in the wake of Proposition 13. This relationship was fundamentally redefined by direct state financing of college operations. As authority over the colleges was more vested in the state legislature, legislators became more interested in college operations and effectiveness. While providing additional funding to the state's community colleges, the legislation also included a mandate to develop an Accountability system to provide indicators on the performance of the colleges. As stated in Assembly Bill 1725 (AB-1725; Vasconcellos):

> It is the intent of the Legislature in enacting this section to foster the creation, implementation, and phase-in of a comprehensive community college accountability system which describes the performance of community colleges in meeting the postsecondary educational needs of students. This educational and fiscal accountability system shall provide performance data on students, programs and institutions (Section 71029.5; p. 45).

The purpose of this mandated accountability system is to "assist all participants in the community college system, including student, faculty, staff, administrators, local governing boards, the chancellor, the state board of governors, the public, and other interested constituencies, in *identifying the educational and fiscal strengths and weaknesses of colleges in order to improve educational quality in community colleges*." (ibid; emphasis added)

Accountability is becoming popular. California has joined a growing legion of other states including Florida, Tennessee, New Jersey, and Texas, that have recently enacted accountability systems for community colleges. As noted by Astin, (1991), major forces behind current assessment and accountability movements in education are the executive and legislative branches of state governments. The current interest in accountability can be traced to the release of widely circulated and quoted report, *A Nation at Risk*. Although higher education was not the target of this report, Astin notes that *A Nation at Risk* helped to cause..."a virtual flood of reports critical of higher education." (1991, p 216). Until recently, accountability systems were primarily focused on elementary and secondary education. These models have been in place for several years in many states, most notably California, New York, Connecticut, and South Carolina (Kaagan & Coley, 1989). As educational reforms such as AB 1725 are implemented, attention will continue to turn to questions regarding the effectiveness of educational reforms and increased funding. It is therefore important to examine accountability systems as an integral part of current efforts to improve education, and to determine if reforms are having the desired effects. Examined in this way, we can analyze the possible effects of accountability, surmise its likelihood of successful implementation, and gauge its prospects for improving outcomes for students.

Focus

This policy research project focuses on the background and substance of the proposed California Community College accountability system, its intended outcomes, who is supposed to change and how, and prospects for achieving the stated goals. What follows is a background of accountability, an analysis of the content of the reform, and options proposed to shift the focus of accountability in ways that would improve educational practice in the community colleges.

The Problem: Why Must Schools be held Accountable?

Accountability is the outcome of a generalized social and political concern over the quality of community colleges that has been building over the last several years. At the state level,

particularly since the passage of Proposition 13 and the consequent shift of community college support from the community to the state level, California Community Colleges have been studied, discussed, legislated, and closely watched.

The debates at the state level regarding the goals of community college education reflect growing debates within the community college system about their future. To some, the emergence of the comprehensive community college, with its role as a democratizing institution in California's system of higher education and its responsiveness to local needs, has made it one of the states' most successful educational contributions. On the other hand, to some analysts, (Astin, 1991; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen, 1982) educational institutions such as community colleges have in large part promoted themselves as a social panacea, promised results they could not ensure, and did not provide real opportunities to many students. During legislative debates over the passage of AB-1725, the historical social and egalitarian role of community colleges was also a subject of intense interest. This refers to the community college's role in opening doors of opportunity to the increasingly diverse segments of California's population. To increase socio-economic equity, raise individual and collective aspirations, offer hope for the disadvantaged, make students independent, raise individual and group self-esteem, and to do so efficiently are all seen as within the role of the community colleges. To fulfill these duties, the legislature provided additional funding with the passage of AB-1725. However, the money came with strings attached. No longer would the legislature operate on the outer fringes of the community college system. Like their counterparts in K-12 education, the legislature wanted indicators of effectiveness. This corresponds to the national trend in which public officials and citizens want to know what their investments in public education have bought (Kaagan & Coley, 1989). California is responding by implementing educational accountability systems.

Since the passage of AB 1725 the state's economy has experienced a dramatic downturn. This has only turned up the volume on calls for accountability and assessment. In contrast to the mid-1980's when additional funding brought accountability mandates, shrinking revenues are now the rationale. More and more entities are competing for fewer public dollars. This is occurring in

practically every state and in all public segments. With scarcer funding, demands for performance assessments are on the rise. The legislatures and public want to know if dollars are being invested wisely and want to be provided with supporting information to back up those claims.

Access continues to be a fundamental concern. The K-12 and post-secondary populations have been experiencing dramatic demographic change. In response, K-12 and community colleges, consistent with their primary mission of access for all, have seen the student population become increasingly heterogeneous. Traditional educational practices which were at one time successful are no longer working for all students. Thus the quality of the product or outcomes of educational institutions is in question. College *non-successes* defined by dropouts, low literacy and numeracy skills, attrition, transfer, and unemployment have created the climate for demands of reform and measures of institutional effectiveness and accountability.

Benefits of Examining Accountability in the Two-Year College

As competition for diminishing public resources becomes more heated, many legislators and public officials view accountability as a potential method for resource allocation. Legislators are looking for ways to justify expenditures and to reward and punish schools for differential performance. Accountability as an educational reform merits examination because of the potential impact it may have on student access and perceptions of what indicators are informative barometers of educational quality.

There are five major sources of this increased interest in community college accountability:

1. The decreasing dollars in the public coffers and the proliferation of strings attached to those dollars,
2. The changing student population for whom traditional educational methods and practices are no longer adequate,
3. Public perceptions of educational quality and the effectiveness of the colleges in meeting the post-secondary educational needs of California's students
4. The competition for legislative attention and funding with the other elements of higher education, and,

5. The evolution of the colleges in communities governed by locally elected boards and the interest shown by the legislature in greater oversight in college management and policy.

There are also other issues raised by accountability that merit examination. For example, will resources be allocated on the basis of comparative performance? Equity issues must be considered. How will colleges respond to an emphasis on outcomes? Will access be limited? Will there be increased reliance on placement tests to sort and track students? These economic and equity issues are not trivial, rather they reach directly to the mission and historical role of the two-year colleges in California. For example, is it possible to have both open-access as defined by little or no requirements for matriculation, minimal pre-requisites, no penalty for withdrawal at any time, diverse educational goals, and indicators of success based on transfer rates, occupational placements, and student persistence in school? These questions are of primary importance and must be observed if accountability is to be successfully implemented. Properly designed and implemented, accountability has the potential for positive impacts, however, it also may be potentially destructive and counterproductive. Much depends on implementation and interpretation.

Method

To better understand the policy antecedents of educational accountability systems, prior research into the institutional impact of organizational, and particularly school reform policies was reviewed (Levin, H., 1974; Wise, 1977; Wildavsky, 1979; McNeil, 1986; Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988). Also, to better gauge the prospects for the reform to achieve its desired goals, organizational reform literature was consulted (Benveniste, 1989). I reviewed policy documents pertaining to the system developed by state level policymakers and the accountability task force. Following this background review, I visited and conducted telephone interviews with two of the participating pilot colleges in southern California. I interviewed staff at the colleges to better understand their views of the impact of the accountability system and their impressions of the likelihood of institutional change from this reform . Data were gathered from participating sites,

and some impacts of the policy documented. I also conducted telephone interviews with staff responsible for accountability system oversight at the state chancellor's office, and university-based consultants to get their views and additional background on this reform. Finally, I conducted interviews with legislative staff from the offices of state legislators to understand their views of how accountability will be used in the legislative process, particularly with the respect to the uses of indicators for resource decisions. The intent of this policy research was to better understand the effects of the system, the usefulness of the indicators and model, and gauge the prospects for this reform to achieve its desired goals; improved outcomes for students. This information should also assist the reader in judging the relative merits of the options presented in this paper.

Evaluation and Background of Accountability System

Scope of the Accountability System

The accountability system, to be implemented over a three-year period beginning in 1991-1992, calls for defining and measuring both quantitatively and qualitatively, indicators within five broad areas:

1. Student Access
2. Student Success
3. Student Satisfaction
4. Staff Composition, and,
5. Fiscal Condition.

State officials and the State Task Force on Accountability suggest that the accountability system will serve as a source of information for the system and local districts to assess their effectiveness, develop and modify programs and services, and assist in budget development (Amsler, et.al., 1991).

Uses of the Accountability System

According to reports issued by the SCOCCC, the accountability system will be used at three levels for different purposes:

1. Annual system-wide reports to the Legislature and other state agencies for use in system-wide strategic planning, policy and budget development. This information will also be available at the college and district levels.

2. College district reports to the Board of Governors (BOG) and Chancellor. Although colleges provide extensive amounts of data currently, this new model is to take the place or incorporate existing reporting mechanisms for program and compliance reviews, fiscal audits, and accreditation.

3. College district reports to local constituencies. State staff anticipate that local districts and colleges will use these data to inform their communities on "the progress being made in meeting local needs." (SCOCCC, 1990; p. 4)

Description of Accountability System

To meet these goals, the accountability system will require the colleges to report on indicators of effectiveness for each of the five areas listed above. Within these indicators are various measures and reports to be completed that document the outcomes achieved by college services, products, and processes. AB-1725 requires the Chancellor's office to "...define qualitatively and quantitatively" specific accountability information for each of these five components. In September, 1991, Far West Regional Laboratory, under contract to the SCOCCC, completed work on the development of these indicators. The information is to be transmitted through a series of reports prepared for the legislature by the Chancellor's office on system-wide performance based on information supplied by the 108 California Community Colleges. In addition, community college districts are to report this information to the Board of Governors and local communities via reports and local governing board meetings. In this way state planners believe that the accountability model can serve a dual role, statewide data needs, and local concerns over institutional effectiveness and outcomes. Table 1 contains the five components of the accountability system, sample indicators proposed to gauge the effectiveness of the colleges in these areas, and how this information might be used.

Table 1

Components, Sample Indicators, Sources, and Uses of Model Accountability System

Component	Indicator	Source	Use*
Student Access	Enrollment by gender, age, ethnicity, disability, full-time, part-time, and high school of origin, developmental and ESL course enrollment, by age, gender, ethnicity	College enrollment reports and state MIS, CA Dept. of Ed. graduation reports College MIS.	Compare student demographic distribution with college service area, local high school graduates or adult population of state to ensure representation of all constituent group
Student Success	Course completion and persistence over two consecutive Fall terms. Transfer, employment, licensing, and graduation rates by ethnicity, gender, age, disability within each field of study. Performance at transfer institution or on the job	College longitudinal tracking reports. Reports on college transfer. Student and employer follow-up surveys, State EDD matching of student ID numbers for employment and wage information College MIS.	Report to SCOCCC and legislature on college performance. Inter-institutional comparisons for funding allocations, incentives, and model program identification. Assist in state level resource allocation. Bases for performance incentives.
Student Satisfaction	Student ratings for five areas: access, instruction, instructional services, student services, and facilities, before during, and after college attendance.	Student surveys of recent high school graduates in local area, surveys of students while in college, and after leaving or graduating	Cross-sectional comparisons of student perceptions of quality of educational services for different groups of students. Inter-institutional comparisons of student satisfaction.
Staff Composition	Number and percentage of staff in each gender, ethnic, and age group, and EEOC job category.	Federal EEOC reports, local reports from Personnel Offices.	Improve campus climate for historically under-represented students. Demonstrate commitment to affirmative action.
Fiscal Condition	State funding reports, ADA reports, and special funding sources; Perkins Act, EOPS, and federal financial aid programs	Quarterly financial reports, state review of spending patterns, ADA projections, annual budget reports	Insure solvency of districts and colleges. Focus on early warning systems to stabilize district budgets

Source: **Amsler, et. al (1991) pp., 6-14)** ***Use information gathered through personal communications with state staff and project consultants**

In all, 19 indicators will be used to gauge the system-wide health of the California community colleges.

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Intended Outcomes of the Accountability System: Who is Supposed to Change?

Review of state policy documents suggests that the intended outcomes of the accountability model are targeted at two levels and sets of policy actors; state level community college officials, and local college faculty and staff. Many of the intended effects of the reform are steeped in expectations of how this system will change the behaviors of college staff. The logic of the system suggests that it intends to improve student learning and success in achieving educational goals. At the state level, the accountability system will be used by state agency personnel to prepare system wide "report-cards" and other reports for the BOG and state legislature. At the local level, the shift to an accountability climate is supposed to make administrators and faculty take responsibility for the improvement of educational indicators. At both levels is an assumption that the collection, aggregation, and dissemination of data will create a climate for accountability that will provide its own impetus for positive change and improvement among staff. However, how this is to occur beyond merely reporting benchmark data is unclear.

State Level Outcomes

> *People must not only follow set procedures, put in time, or make valiant efforts, but they must actually produce desired results. Success or failure - both individual and institutional - should meet with predictable and sure consequences. (Amsler, 1991: p. 3)*

As stated earlier in this paper, the overarching purpose of the accountability system is to "maintain and improve the quality of the institution and enhance the California Community Colleges (SCOCCC, p. 2). A subset of this intended outcome is that colleges will report consistent data for the 19 indicators mandated by the Chancellor's office. The legislature and Board of Governors will receive an annual report on the system-wide health of the California community colleges from the Chancellor's office These indicators will then be used by these bodies determine if the system is meeting its post-secondary obligations to the people of California. As the foregoing quote from the implementation guide suggests, some intend to use this information as a way to judge the performance of the colleges in a way that rewards what is perceived as success and punishes what is perceived as failure. This perception was generally

held by interviewees. Additional outcomes discussed in the implementation guide and gleaned from interviews are discussed below.

Improve Public Relations. The Chancellor's office states that the accountability system will assist state community college officials in securing funding for the colleges by publicizing their success and the scope of their mission to the legislature. The availability of this information will leverage funding from an increasingly skeptical and recalcitrant legislature. Additionally, the accountability system will document the successes of the colleges to the public, who, in turn will respond favorably at the ballot box when bond measures come up for consideration.

State Level Planning. Another intended outcome is the use of these data by the California Community College state Board of Governors for systemwide strategic planning, policy development and budget formulation. This will enable the Board to set priorities, establish benchmarks, and chart systemwide progress in improving indicators deemed unfavorable. Additionally, disaggregation of these data by college and district will highlight exemplary programs for special citation as demonstration or model practice sites . As the lead quote for this section suggests, citations may not be limited to only exemplary institutions, colleges perceived as under-achieving will also draw special consideration.

Local Outcomes

> *An accountability system cannot be treated as an add-on program driven by external regulations or requirements. Rather, it must be developed primarily for local use. Such a system should be the engine that drives the institution toward ongoing change and improvement.* (Amsler, 1991: p 21)

The above quote from the implementation guide for community college accountability illustrates one proposed outcome and focus for change of the statewide accountability model. The guide suggests that proactive districts and local college leaders with "vision" will use accountability indicators as a method to develop institutional identity and to monitor effectiveness of college programs and services.

Broaden the Vision of College Leaders. The accountability system is also intended to widen the scope of college leadership through the availability of indicators of college performance. Access to this information will enhance the responsibility of key faculty and staff within the institution, and indicate a more productive use of resources.

Enable Strategic Planning through Availability of Information. Through increased access to information and enhanced information technology, college leadership at the local and state levels will be better able to plan for and accommodate change. Through the standardization of indicators, college leaders will be able to assess trends over time, and to modify or expand college services in anticipation of changes in the external environment. For example, if demographic analysis of the college service area indicates continued growth in the number of individuals lacking English proficiency, then colleges can expand their offerings in ESL to accommodate the changes observed in the community.

Development of Local Indicators. Through the collection and reporting of the 19 accountability indicators, state level officials expect that the colleges will take the initiative and develop local indicators of effectiveness for reporting and planning. These local accountability reports would be reviewed by local governing boards, administrators, faculty, staff, and students. accountability system planners hope that linkages between state and local accountability indicators will develop, and colleges will see the value in providing such data to local stakeholders.

Improve College Educational Services. According to the Chancellor's office, and as suggested by the title of the implementation guide: "Improving It: Accountability by Design," positive reform of the colleges is the philosophical core of the accountability system. All of the various implementation components of accountability, information access and technology, indicators, standardization, staff development, and the development of vision, are directed at improving the colleges' performance. This implies that the teaching and learning will be enhanced and will be evidenced by improvement in the student success and satisfaction indicators over time. The improvement of teaching and learning should theoretically lead to improved graduation rates, higher retention, persistence, transfer, and employment rates. Thus, this system seeks to improve

the educational outcomes for students, by providing information on college performance to faculty and staff. Based on this feedback, colleges not performing well are to make improvements in their assessment, instructional, and student services practices.

Intended Outcomes Summary

The intended outcomes discussion suggests that state accountability system architects believe that the system will have far-reaching effects on college operations. The action needed to report the 19 effectiveness indicators will increase the demand for other measures of effectiveness throughout the colleges and districts. That is, the availability or supply of these benchmark data will create an impetus or demand for change. It is expected that this change to an "accountability climate" will improve all aspects of college operations, from instruction to facilities maintenance, budget development, program review, and strategic planning. However, these are all options. At this point, beyond the mere reporting of the 19 indicators, it is difficult to fully discern all of the intended outcomes of the accountability system.

Analysis and Discussion of Accountability as Educational Reform

Accountability as a Political Response to Change

Accountability is both a response to current social and historical forces and a reflection of these forces. The changes in student demographics, the decline of rigid course-taking patterns, the "tracking" of the liberal arts, remedial, and vocational students, the "all things to all people" approach of the community colleges, declining public revenues, and the growing tension between local control and state legislative funding and increased oversight have all contributed to the growth in demands for "outcomes" assessment and educational accountability. Although accountability may in part, reflect growing concern about the effectiveness of the community colleges, the approach does not adequately recognize the profound social and economic changes taking place in

our state. Rather, accountability is viewed by local staff as a method to compel colleges to do a better job in a prescribed way with new populations with fewer resources.

Assumptions of the Accountability Reform

As designed, the accountability system makes some fundamental assumptions about the community colleges and their post-secondary education and training role. This system has two underlying assumptions which resemble Levin's (1974) characterization of the "political accountability model." These characteristics are:

1. There is no unanimity about program goals, and,
2. The performance information will be used differently by different groups, depending on their preferences and their stake in the struggle for control of program resources and influence (pp 368-369). .

Program Goal Unanimity. The legislative concept of accountability assumes there exists agreement of the goals of education generally and the colleges specifically. As suggested by Cohen (1985), the intellectual purposes of educational institutions in this country are not fully agreed upon. This is particularly true in the community colleges. Some feel that the colleges should emphasize the liberal arts (Cohen & Brawer, 1982) and rededicate the colleges to the collegiate function. Others argue that we need to better prepare workers to be adaptable in our rapidly changing workplace and to emphasize the career education function (Grubb, 1986). Some are concerned about low levels of literacy and numeracy among our adults and emphasize the developmental function of the colleges. Others see the rapid growth in new immigrants and argue for English language instruction and citizenship training. Others cite the growth in, and isolation of, our elderly citizenry and press for programs in health, social interaction, and community courses for this group. However, the accountability system appears to assume that consensus has been achieved by legislative fiat. This external consensus may have little effect on how individual communities use the colleges.

Colleges are Unique. Accountability seeks to apply a set of indicators to a group of 108 institutions that are not monolithic. As indicated by Cohen (1985) educational institutions bear the stamp of their socio-historic era, and the community context plays a large part in shaping how the institutions function. What may be a useful indicator in one college, may be of little value in another. The evolution of the California community colleges into a statewide network of comprehensive, "open-door" institutions has brought with it several features unique to the system, and each college has a unique identification and role within the community. Take transfer for example. Some colleges, such as those in the Los Angeles or San Francisco Bay areas may have several senior institutions nearby to which an aspiring transfer student can attend, and they have tried to develop transfer programs to respond to that perceived need. However, other colleges may be may be more than 300 miles away from a senior institution. These colleges never developed a strong transfer program because historically it was not a priority, nor much of a reality. In these communities, the college often functions as a community education center, offering numerous short courses, workshops, and cultural and recreational activities that are open to the public. These differences in function reflect the communities in which they evolved.

Improve performance of college leaders. As observed by Elmore and McLaughlin (1988), some reforms assume that educators know what to do to make things better, the problem is getting them to do it. This assumption of purposeful non-performance is evident in the proposed accountability system. This reform assumes that community college educators are engaged in mal- or non-feasance in the conduct of their jobs. Accountability is supposed to improve education in the colleges by making these administrators responsible for the reported outcomes. The problem is that we know very little about "what works" in education. Indicators might suggest if things are going wrong, however, tell us little about how to make things better (Astin, 1991).

Control over the uncontrollable. Despite the rather loosely defined process of student matriculation in the colleges, the state legislature continues to emphasize preparation for transfer and structured occupational programs. When it appears student goals are becoming more diffuse, fewer credit hours are being taken, greater numbers are working full or part time, and the

numbers of students requiring basic skills, and English language instruction increases, the colleges are being told to reaffirm and strengthen their collegiate function and improve their indicators of effectiveness. This type of reform assumes that the college leaders have greater control over the behaviors and choices of their students than is warranted.

ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY OPTIONS

Three options are presented and discussed below which might be considered when policymakers look at how educational institutions are made to improve. Because the primary goal of accountability, or any other educational reform, is to improve educational processes and outcomes, policymakers may want to consider alternatives or modifications to assure that students benefit from this proposed reform. One alternative deals strictly with accountability as currently proposed. Using prior research into school and organizational reform, the discussion focuses primarily on the potential impact of the accountability system on the two-year colleges. In particular, attention is focused on the assumptions of the reform, obstacles to its implementation, and the likelihood that it will achieve its intended outcomes.

The second option discussed is the current program used to assess institutional effectiveness: Accreditation. As with the accountability system, Accreditation is a judgmental process which is designed to assess the quality of the community colleges in several areas ranging from facilities and maintenance to instruction and campus climate. Astin (1991), characterizes accreditation as "environment only" assessment. However, it is here that the similarity with accountability ends. As discussed above, accountability is primarily a judgmental assessment which emphasizes outputs, while Accreditation is a judgmental process emphasizing inputs. These inputs include books in the library, computers in the learning lab, degrees held by faculty, etc. The Accreditation process relies on the expert judgment of educators organized by regional accrediting bodies such as the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) to visit colleges, collect data, and make judgments as to institutional quality based on their own observations and findings from the "self-study" conducted by the college. WASC has recently revised and upgraded the standards that the institutions must meet in order to remain accredited. These include some outcomes information. This second alternative might also be considered by legislators when considering how to assess institutional quality.

A third option is presented which suggests a rethinking of how to evaluate educational institutions. This section draws upon the works of educational researchers and policy analysts in proposing an alternative model of assessing institutional quality. This proposed model incorporates concepts from both the Accreditation and accountability policy options discussed earlier, buts adds another dimension: environment as policy mediator. A fundamental question in any assessment model that relies on indicators to judge effectiveness is, can indicators reflect differences while promoting equity? We should recognize in policy what we realize in fact, that not all schools and colleges, teachers, and students start even. Some systems face greater difficulties than others in educating. For example, achieving desired educational outcomes will be more difficult for colleges with large numbers of non-English speaking students. Resources for some colleges may be less in areas with higher unemployment or experiencing regional economic recession. This model proposes that indicators recognize what other researchers have noted, that variation in educational institutions, particularly community colleges, is the norm, rather than the exception (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988). This proposal recommends that educators and assessors focus on a "value-added" approach to judging institutional effectiveness.

Option 1: Implement Accountability System as Planned

Option one proposes the direct implementation of the planned accountability system. What follows below is a detailed discussion of some possible implications of this proposal, potential obstacles to success, and the likelihood for it to achieve its stated goal of improved teaching and learning in the California Community Colleges if implemented as planned.

Prospects for Achieving Goals

Although the accountability system is intended to improve the development and delivery of college programs and services, there is little evidence that the imposition of an externally driven accountability system will improve the intended outcomes or processes. As legislated, this reform lacks an understanding of the social and institutional contexts of the community colleges.

Attempts to Rationalize the Irrational

The design of the accountability system suggests that state level policymakers work under the assumption that the community colleges are "tightly coupled," rational organizations, like a factory or business under hierarchical management. System planners act as though improved management, and goal-setting obtained through accountability can improve the outputs of schools. Wise (1977) suggests that educational institutions are loosely coupled organizations and, as such, changes in one area may not affect the outcomes or processes of education. The accountability system is a prime example of what Wise terms a "first -order solution" (p. 45) where a school problem is identified and the statement of the problem becomes the statement of the solution as a first-order analysis of the problem. Community colleges are not accountable, so create an "Accountability" program. Thus, what *appears* logical to policymakers as an attempt to improve college outcomes through external reporting mandates appears to form the basis of this reform. Wise characterizes reforms that assume a rational hierarchy exists in educational institutions as "hyperrational." (1977). This hyperrationalization approach to reform is evident in the philosophy and design of the accountability system.

Another feature of hyperrationalization is the synergistic effects of increased reporting, mandates, and data gathering. As proposed, accountability also holds forth the promise of increasing mandates, goals, and legislative management of the colleges. As suggested by state officials I interviewed, state monitoring of indicators will probably be used to make inter-college comparisons by legislators and state staff. If some colleges are found to be below some specified standard (e.g., a low transfer rate), then this may result in these institutions having to explain why this is the case and to implement a remedy. The remedy (e.g., install a Transfer Center) may also appear to be a logical, first-order solution to the problem, and may or may not help with the indicator. However, the college will probably be required to report on the remedy and the indicator. Accountability thus has the potential of creating a spiraling trend of mandates, goals, and reporting. This is another example of a rational model being applied to institutions that are loosely-coupled with multiple, semi-independent sources of authority within them that include

administrators, unions, faculty senates, and locally elected boards. Educational institutions such as community colleges are inherently resistant to change, not necessarily through overt acts of defiance, but often by the nature of the organization which has conflicting and competing sources of authority to contend with internally.

Contradictions within the Accountability Model-Unintended Outcomes

By legislating indicators, and, as some have suggested, outcomes, the accountability system contains built-in contradictions which, in practice, may serve to undermine the very reforms it seeks to strengthen.

Open-Access Conflict. This issue strikes at the core of the current debate over the community college mission, that of access vs. quality. Many persons equate open admissions with the absence of any academic performance criteria in the admissions process. However given the increasing diversity of incoming student educational skill levels coupled with funding restraints on the one hand and legislative demands for accountability on the other, community colleges may be compelled to make fundamental choices about their future and who they are to serve. As suggested by McNeil (1986) the contradiction of increased control is that the more tightly the reins of oversight are pulled in on loosely-coupled institutions like the community colleges, the less likely positive change will occur.

This problem may be avoided if strict attention is paid to the access component of accountability. In this way, colleges would have greater difficulty restricting access to those thought most likely to succeed and hence improving indicators by limiting access. In any event, it is unlikely that the colleges would succeed in limiting access. The proximity of the colleges to the communities they serve, as well as the influence of groups concerned with educational access and equity such as MeCHA, MALDEF, and others may present powerful opposition to any proposals or practices that limit access. The traditional role of the colleges as open-door institutions may trigger political opposition from key legislators and constituent groups opposed to any change in the open-door mission of the colleges.

The Access Trap. Some scholars assert that community colleges perpetuate social stratification and other inequalities by limiting the education achievement of students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Clark, 1960; Brint & Karabel, 1989). Under accountability, colleges will be assessed based on the enrollment of students traditionally under-represented in higher education. If they are under-enrolling any particular group, this is viewed negatively. However, if they over-recruit traditionally under-represented students, then they are accused of tracking these individuals to dead-end terminal occupational degrees and vocational certificates, thus effectively throttling aspirations. The colleges are caught in a double bind.

Sharpening the guillotine. Another contradiction in the model is centered on the issue of reporting unfavorable data. State level policymakers are interested in a system to inform the allocation of resources to districts with positive indicators, while local decisionmakers are interested in obtaining local data for program review and improvement. As suggested by project consultants, the system was designed to minimize this problem through direct transmission of college indicators to the SCOCCC via computer hookup. However, this assumption may prove inadequate. Local personnel are still required to enter the data, staff are expected to compute formulas, and prepare the data for transmission. There still exists opportunities for latitude in interpreting how certain formula are to be computed (transfer rate is one example). Despite the best efforts of accountability system planners to minimize the problem of reporting unfavorable data, this could still continue to be a problem. As the system is implemented, educators may feel pressured to alter responses in ways that diminish any negative consequences resulting from unfavorable indicators. As one college official put it, "Why sharpen their guillotine? (Hayward, et. al. 1991)

Public reaction. Another possible contradiction may be found in the public response to this information. A stated goal of the accountability system is to obtain funding from the public and the legislature by demonstrating the effectiveness of the colleges. As suggested by Oakes (1986, p. 30), this strategy may backfire. The public may view positive reports of college effectiveness as an indication that all is well with the system, and not approve additional funding

beyond current levels. That is, good news may breed complacency. Or, if reports are issued that are critical of the college's effectiveness, the effect may be to punish the unaccountable colleges for mal-feasance and vote to cut or limit funding. Public support may actually decline.

Implementation Costs

Although precise information on the costs of implementing the accountability system are lacking, there are data which suggest the system will be expensive. For example, California spent approximately $6.5 million of it's approximately $13.5 billion elementary and secondary education budget in 1987 to maintain an extensive data system for the development and collection of accountability indicators, and dissemination of performance reports to local schools (Oakes, 1986; p. 29). Cost estimates from the four pilot sites for the one-year projects were in the range of $108, 120 to $189, 296 (Hayward, et.al., 1991; p. 21). Review of the Hayward report is instructive. Although they were charged with determining state and local implementation costs for accountability implementation, they were unable to do so. This is due primarily to the misperception at the state level regarding the tremendous variation among institutions. As noted earlier in this paper, the "system" of community colleges is characterized by variation. As stated by the authors: "There is an extraordinarily wide range of sophistication in the implementation of MIS systems, research capability, and importance placed on accountability. *This variation makes it impossible to produce reasonable cost estimates for AB 1725 accountability* (ibid, p. 23) (emphasis added).

The issues described above highlight some of the potential difficulties this reform faces. Much of the problems facing successful implementation of accountability and the long-term success of this reform are endemic to many other educational reforms that treat disparate institutions similarly.

Option 2-Maintain and Modify Present Accreditation Process

The current policy of assessing community college effectiveness using the long-established Accreditation process is one viable policy option. Because this process developed from the notion

that educators themselves can best assess the quality of an institution, educators and many of their supporters in the legislature would be supportive of this approach. The WASC accreditation policies recently underwent revision including to include greater oversight and more comprehensive inquiry and reporting on outcomes. These new standards may provide sufficient assurances to accountability advocates that the process is objective and would provide impetus for institutional improvement with respect to outcomes. It would be the least costly to implement because it would not require the adoption of new processes, mandates, computer reporting systems, and it is currently in place. It is generally accepted, and according to college officials interviewed, seems to function reasonably well.

However, some state level officials feel the Accreditation process is inadequate. They argue that if Accreditation is a successful process, why are we seeing declining transfer rates to the University of California, fewer Associates degrees awarded, and declines in transfer level and traditional liberal arts courses? According to legislative staff I interviewed, Accreditation and the self-study process has not been rigorous enough to prevent the decline of the community college curriculum, educational standards, and equality of educational outcomes. In the view of some, Accreditation site teams have been too kind to many institutions and have been lax in the application of standards viewed as disruptive and costly to implement. To accountability advocates in the legislature, over-reliance on accreditation results to judge institutional quality lessens the possibility that the status quo will be seriously threatened, or unflattering information revealed. Although Accreditation is viewed as an important process for maintaining collegiate viability through application of agreed upon standards for quality and resource allocation within a college, it is not viewed by some key legislators as a substitute for the kinds of indicators that accountability would provide. It is primarily a judgmental process emphasizing institutional resources such as books in the library, instructional equipment, degrees held by the faculty, and internal communication and governance processes. This emphasis on inputs rather than outcomes is a fundamentally different approach to judging institutional effectiveness.

Option 3: A Value-Added Approach: Environment as Policy Mediator

As [community college] faculty you have taken on the most difficult task in all of higher education...Your task is not to teach those who will be successful, but to make successful those who come .
(K. Patricia Cross,
from a speech delivered at San Diego City College, April, 1988)

Community colleges occupy a unique position in the education spectrum. They are institutions with broad comprehensive missions and multiple foci. They are to serve as open-access, low cost institutions with little or no requirements for matriculation that provide the first two-years of education leading to the baccalaureate, career education designed to make students employable, as well as an array of community service and general education functions. As "democracy's colleges," they are to serve as a bridge to the universities from the high schools for all who choose to enroll

Herein lies the difficulty with the application of broad indicators such as those proposed by the accountability system. While indicators, like the dials on an instrument panel, tell us something about the institution, they do so in a way that reveals little about the what the indicator reflects, the context, and the environment. Thus their meaning is often unclear Differences among institutions and the community of learners they serve, mean that, although two colleges may achieve the very same results on certain indicator, their actual *accomplishments* might vary considerably (Oakes, 1986). As stated by Kaagan & Coley:

> The usefulness of an indicator rests on its ability to show what happens over time, what it can say about the performance of a school or district compared to other schools or districts, or how the condition it measures compares with societal needs or expectations. (Kaagan & Coley, 1989; p. 7)

Comparing readings across time or locations doesn't tell us whether conditions are bad or good, it only tells us whether things are better or worse. To be useful, indicators should measure ubiquitous features of community colleges-dimensions that can be found in some for throughout the system (per student expenditures, faculty student ratios). Additionally, indicators should be

combined, much like the Consumer Price Index is, to illustrate the ingredients of an observed outcome. This point was also stressed by Oakes (1988):

> If we have only indicators of how well the system is meeting important goals such as achievement scores, we would lack other information-teacher quality, instructional processes, resources and materials-needed to judge the overall condition (p. 8).

Ideally, then, a system of indicators measures distinct components of the system of interest, and also provides information about how the individual components work together to produce the overall effect. Indicators may be useful standard bearers for an institution when they are composed of contextual and process variables that suggest the *environment* for positive change that mediates policy inputs, student characteristics, institutional climate and socio-historical characteristics in building composite indicators of educational vitality in the community colleges. By focusing on the inputs, context, processes, and environments of the various community colleges, legislators and educators can seek to improve educational practice by suggesting how outcomes are affected by different educational policies, practices, environments, and contextual variables. In this way, indicators can begin to inform policymaking about what combinations of inputs, contexts, environments, produce observed outcomes. We can begin to use such a system to track and collect data on how we can act to improve learning outcomes for students.

We may want to consider grouping institutions for comparison purposes. This is done in several state accountability systems. For example, in California, elementary and secondary schools are grouped according to characteristics of the students attending. Grouping variables include parent education and occupation, percent of limited English proficient students, mobility rates (students entering and leaving a school during the school year), and the percent receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) (Kaagan & Coley, 1988). Thus, in the K-12 system, California has attempted to group different schools according to certain socio-economic

and educational characteristics. This is in itself a recognition of the importance of context variables.

Value-Added Approach

Although grouping and comparing indicators across institutions improves the information yielded by accountability, it is still an incomplete system. Some researchers and analysts have argued for a "value-added" approach to educational assessment (Astin, 1991; Jacobi; et. al. 1987). This approach to performance reporting would best serve what should be the true function of accountability, the development of talent in students. According to this view, institutional effectiveness is determined by our ability to develop the talents of students to the fullest extent. Thus, the "best" institutions are not necessarily those with the best indicators, but those which demonstrate the greatest impact and add the most value to the student. This approach to accountability looks most carefully at how to structure educational environments so as to maximize talent development while controlling for initial student characteristics upon entry. Because of the heavy influence of inputs on outcomes, we should, through the application of multivariate statistical analyses, attempt to control for the biasing effects of entering student characteristics to assess the effects of differing educational environments on student outcomes.

The Data Base

According to Astin (1991, p. 235), the lack of an adequate comprehensive student data-base is "perhaps the single biggest obstacle confronting any institution that wishes to use assessment to enhance talent development." Implementation of the accountability system requires a large investment in data-base development. Hardware and software requirements are expected to be very costly. With some modifications, this data-base might be modified to implement a value-added, or talent development approach to performance assessment. Two essential features or modifications to the data-base under development are presented below.

Longitudinal Data. Community colleges interested in implementing a value-added approach to accountability need to develop a comprehensive longitudinal student base that includes input (SES, native language, parent educational levels, hours worked per week, etc.), environmental, and outcome information on each student (Kaagan & Coley, 1988; Astin, 1991).

Cohort Approach. The most useful method would be to design such a system using a cohort approach. Each cohort would represent a new population of entering students. This would enable colleges to track changes over time, and better assess the impact of policy changes on student outcome data. It is recommended that the initial data-base be viewed as a retention file that integrates data from the admissions and application process, with a survey of incoming student's views about their educational experience. Initially, this retention file can also serve as the base for a more comprehensive data file to be developed as the system is implemented.

Using Assessment Results

The most important feature of accountability is the use of assessment results. College staff frequently expressed concern over how the results were to be used at the state level. To be most effective, and to best serve the needs of students and accountability advocates seeking improved outcomes, assessment results should be used as feedback to college leaders to enhance their understanding of those educational practices that are most likely to add-value, or enhance talent development. Specifically, to the extent possible, the feedback from accountability should be designed to illuminate the connections between different educational policies and practices and various student outcomes.

Accountability and Talent Development

On its face, the recommended modification of the proposed accountability system into a value-added, or talent development approach appears to require a fundamental re-thinking of how we have traditionally assessed institutional quality. This is not necessarily the case. It is primarily an attempt to match our assessment efforts with our rhetoric and stated goals for community college education. In short, the community colleges will best serve their educational mission by

doing less assessment for the purposes of ranking, screening, and comparison, and more assessment designed to inform college policy and guide educational practice. Rather than viewing accountability as a comparison of college status, or relative rankings, we need to view it more as a method for determining what we do and what we actually accomplish.

We are still at the early stages of the implementation of the accountability system. Much remains to be accomplished and modified given the recently completed field test of the model. There is an opportunity here to refocus the system on the value-added approach described above. Modifications to existing plans, such as database hardware and software development, would be minor. Indicators can be added, and systems for providing useful and change-instructive feedback to the colleges developed. In short, the impetus for change exists, the mandates for improvements are legislated, the essential ingredients are there. What is needed now is the will to change our philosophy of accountability and performance assessment. Given the educational and training needs of our citizenry, and the relative paucity of information in education about *what works*, we should do no less.

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